

Document D: Terry Avinger

Background: Terry Avinger was born in 1954. He spent his early childhood living with his grandmother and aunt in upscale Philadelphia. At the age of ten he moved to North Philadelphia with his mother and ten siblings. Avinger ended up joining a street gang, where he witnessed a close friend get shot and killed. During high school he lost a younger brother to a medical condition and a year later, his father was killed in a bar shooting. To ease the burden of his troubled life Avinger began to abuse drugs. His education suffered and he was held back in school.

Naval Service: In 1971 Avinger joined the Navy hoping to escape the difficult life he lived in Philadelphia. At boot camp his former use of drugs came to light and Avinger was almost discharged. He successfully petitioned to stay in the Navy and went on to attend aviation school in Memphis. As an Airman Apprentice he was reassigned to San Diego, California. By the fall of 1972, Avinger had been found guilty of four offenses against the Uniform Code of Military Justice ranging from “disrespect to a commissioned officer” to “absence without leave.”

USS *Kitty Hawk*: Assigned to the aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk*, Avinger deployed to Vietnam with the ship in 1972. Racial tensions and general frustration ran high aboard this ship in October 1972 when news came in that the ship would be extending its deployment and not returning to California as anticipated. At dinner time on October 11, Avinger watched a white sailor in front of him in the mess line get two grilled cheese sandwiches. Avinger attempted to take an extra portion as well, but was scolded by the cook. Moments later a white mess cook stepped on another African American sailor's foot. The racially charged situation turned violent. Later that night, using brooms, wrenches, pipes, and in some cases their bare fists, black sailors began beating up white sailors. By the time the riot quieted down, 47 injury reports had been filed. After the riot Avinger, one of the ringleaders, was sent off the ship to the brig (jail) in San Diego. He was discharged from the Navy in 1973. Between 1973 and 1984, Avinger was incarcerated twice and spent several stints in drug rehab centers. Over time he earned an advanced degree in social work and found employment as a drug and alcohol counselor.



USS *Kitty Hawk*, which Terry Avinger served aboard in the fall of 1972.